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Reviews

1943

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†"Something for the Boys" opened Thursday, January 7th, at the Alvin Theatre.

THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN	NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK POST	NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE	NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"	NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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"Something for the Boys"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 8, 1943

"Something for the Boys" Is Also One for the Hit Column

"Something for the Boys," musical comedy by Herbert and Dorothy Fields, with Cole Porter songs. Produced by Michael Todd at the Alvin Theatre, New York, Jan. 7, 1943.

★ ★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

MY BEST advice to you this morning, in reference to the production last evening of "Something for the Boys" at the Alvin theatre, is that you had better run, not walk, to the nearest agency, if you can't get to the theatre, and reserve seats for the near future.

For here we have another of those happy overnight hits that will run out the season and be greatly in demand. It doesn't matter much what you personally may think about it. It is a perfect sample of the sort of musical comedy entertainment that 98 per cent of the playgoing populace revels in.

And as a plus quality it has Ethel Merman, in fine health and buoyant spirits, riding the air waves with abandon. Abandon and shouting melody as well.

She is again the star of the show. No Gaxton. No Moore. No anybody with whom she has to share her billing. Unless it be Cole Porter. He wrote all the songs, and no one can write Merman songs as well as he, just as no one can sing Porter songs better than she.

The New Merman

The Merman has gained confidence, of course, with her succession of successes. With the confidence has come an improved stage presence and a better sense of comedy. She didn't work with the best comedians for nothing.

She can clown now without suggesting an irresponsible talent turned loose in the backroom of a hot spot. She has abandoned the torch, but nursed the flame of a genius for the art known as putting over a song.

Besides Cole Porter, Ethel can generously credit Herbert and Dorothy Fields for a couple of assists. They are among the few librettists who have developed skill in writing a book show that holds together, with acceptable sequences and reasonably sane, as well as smart, patter.

In "Something for the Boys" they tell the one about a couple of comic heiresses and one heir who were left a Texas ranch abutting Kelly field.

The heiresses went down there and opened a lodging to which the boys could invite their wives, but the Colonel had his suspicions aroused and closed the place up.

Things might have gone hard with the promoters if Blossom, that would be Ethel, had not discovered that because she had a carborundum filling in a tooth she became a natural radio receiving set and could listen in on military secrets. Which is a foolish but funny twist.

Ethel can also thank Michael Todd for letting Hassard Short stage "Something for the Boys." This combination of Todd and Short is rapidly approaching that niche in show business that hasn't been completely filled since Florenz Ziegfeld and Josef Urban died.

Todd is cultivating the priceless gift, not only of appreciating a good thing when he sees it, but of being willing to give the men who can produce the thing he wants produced a chance to work out their ideas.

His aids in this instance include Howard Bay, who has designed handsome sets, Billy Livingston, whose costumes are modest yet striking, and Jack Cole, whose dance routines are superior.

And finally Ethel can thank herself for being willing to let Mr. Todd surround her with a cast of exceptional specialists—Betty Bruce, an excellent dancer; Anita Alvarez, who scores a flashing hit in her one appearance; Bill Callahan, a new dancing discovery; Bill Johnson, a prize among the romantic leads; Paula Laurence, a growing character comedienne; Allen Jenkins, a screen favorite who makes a happy return to Broadway; William Lynn, Frances Mercer, Betty Garrett—not a miss among them.

All of which makes "Something for the Boys" the cheeriest news the Broadway theatre has had in many weeks.

NEW YORK TIMES
January 8, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Something for the Boys"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ALL season long the world has yearned hopefully for a big, fast, glittering musical comedy. It has it now, for last evening the fabulous Mike Todd brought in "Something for the Boys," and as it danced its way across the stage of the Alvin it quite clearly was not only something pretty wonderful for the boys, but something for the girls as well. For Cole Porter has taken tunes from his topmost drawer, Herbert and Dorothy Fields have written words that are better than most, Hassard Short has directed in his usual impeccable manner and Ethel Merman gives a performance that suggests all Merman performances before last night were simply practice. In short, this is the musical comedy for which Broadway has been waiting a long, long time.

• • •

It has almost everything, this "Something for the Boys." Mr. Porter has provided songs of every description, and while none of them is as good as the best Cole Porter song on record, the average is far above the general musical show. In building his production, Mr. Todd, for whom the United States Treasury must have a friendly feeling by now, has been lavish to the point of excellent good taste. The settings by Howard Bay are superb and the costumes designed by Billy Livingston are magnificent. Mr. Todd has thought nothing of hiring dozens of people to sing and to dance; he likes a stage full of people obviously having a good time. And with Miss Merman there, the good time is on both sides of the lights.

For she is truly immense. Ethel Merman in good voice is a raucous overtone to the trumpets of a band; it is a soft trill for a torch song, it is tinny for a parody and fast for one of Mr. Porter's complicated lyrics. Accompanying the voice are all the necessary gestures, the roll of the eye or the wave of the hand to suggest friendly ribaldries or separations forever more. In "Hey, Good Lookin'" she is loud, in "He's a Right Guy" she is soft; it is one of Mr. Porter's lines that sums it up pretty well; she is "the missing link between Lily Pons and Mae West." And a credit, of course, to the pair of them.

• • •

And there are others. Out of a few minor Broadway parts, and a few major ones in the night clubs, has come Paula Laurence to make her professional musical comedy debut. She is an excellent foil for Miss Merman, a deadpan comedienne of a stern and angular countenance; a duet they sing together—"By the Mississinewa"—is the funniest moment in a musical show in years. Also there is Allen Jenkins, returning to Broadway after too long an absence, to bring back that bland, faintly retarded air that should be in the foreground of all such shows from now on.

Lesser performers? They wouldn't be called that in any other musical than Mr. Todd's. Note Jed Prouty, note also Betty Bruce, who is an excellent dancer. Bill Johnson is present to sing the male part of such songs as can't be done entirely by Miss Merman; Anita Alvarez is present to lead the Spanish dance without which no musical show set in Texas would be considered legal. William Lynn, for years the Irwin of "Three Men on a Horse," is a strange little figure who bobs up throughout the proceedings, and is very comical at it. Frances Mercer has a role and Jack Hartley plays an Army colonel as though he were a major general.

• • •

The story? It is all about three folks who inherit a Texas ranch via the Court of Missing Heirs. The ranch is near Kelly Field, and when that juxtaposition doesn't completely fulfill the Fields's ideas of musical comedy, they simply stick a bit of carborundum on one of Miss Merman's teeth and she becomes a radio receiving set. The Fields read that one in the newspapers, but the papers had to get along without Mr. Porter, without Miss Merman, without dances by Jack Cole, without, in short, "Something for the Boys." And this last will be getting along by itself for some time to come.

NEW YORK SUN
January 8, 1943

'Something for the Boys,' With Ethel Merman, Opens at the Alvin

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

"SOMETHING FOR THE BOYS" appeared last evening at the Alvin and made Broadway a better place to laugh in. We can thank Michael Todd for this, and Cole Porter and a good many others, and most of all Miss Ethel Merman, whose face and eyes are as round as ever, who is almost constantly on view and who is as jaunty and wickedly funny as even she ever dared to be. Very fine goings on, these at the Alvin, and very cheering.

Mr. Todd, always a lavish man, has been lavish with everything. He has contrived a show which is large and handsome; he has found extremely ornamental young women to wear delightful costumes. He has even, thanks to Herbert and Dorothy Fields, got Miss Merman and her partners in frolic a gay and foolish book. As a result of the Fields's devising, Miss Merman inherits a third of a Texas ranch, sharing it with a pair of peculiar cousins. She sets up an assembly line, gets involved with an army camp, is finally turned into a radio. (All according to science, this last, and those who don't believe it can look it up.) As a result of being a radio, Miss Merman saves everybody from practically everything.

As a result of being Miss Merman, which is probably more difficult than being a radio, she makes pretty funny lines into hilarious lines. She makes lively and amiable songs into superlative songs, giving Mr. Porter all she has. Mr. Porter's music is up to his standard; his lyrics lack, on the whole, the intricate wickedness he usually displays. "Something for the Boys" isn't very wicked, except for the Merman eyes. These are not, I believe, as yet illegal.

Along with story and Miss Merman, and pretty girls in pretty frocks, "Something for the Boys" has Miss Paula Laurence as one of the cousins—and as Miss Merman's partner in singing "By the Mississinewa" which is a strangely mad song and highly comical. Allen Jenkins, out of the movies, is the other cousin and works hard at comedy, but is not often as funny as William Lynn, who portrays a strange little man whose sister "flies the 4:45 broom out of Flushing." Betty Bruce taps charmingly; Betty Garrett sings "I'm in Love With a Soldier Boy" delightfully, Bill Johnson is a tuneful love interest and Frances Mercer, the plot's trouble maker, is as graceful about it, and as good humored, as circumstances permit.

I think you will heartily approve all these things and people, and particularly such Merman-sung songs as the title song, "He's a Right Guy," "The Leader of a Big Time Band," "There's a Happy Land in the Sky," "Hey, Good Lookin'" and, naturally, the curious Mississinewa number. If you don't like these, and the high polish of the whole affair, the general dash and go of it, you are probably allergic to musical comedy. Even for this unfortunate condition, "Something for the Boys" might easily prove a remedy. Certainly it is an evening's alleviation for a lot of other ills.

"Something for the Boys"

NEW YORK POST
January 8, 1943

Ethel Merman Returns in a New Hit, "Something for the Boys"

By WILELLA WALDORF

BROADWAY had to wait until January for the first smash hit musical comedy of the season. But "Something for the Boys," produced by Michael Todd last night at the Alvin Theatre, was worth waiting for. Give Ethel Merman some typical Cole Porter songs to sing and you have the makings of a good show right there. Mr. Todd, however, has been prodigal and turned out a production that is superior in every department. "Something for the Boys" is not only tuneful to listen to, and handsome to look at. It is also one of the funniest musicals Broadway has seen in some time.

Herbert and Dorothy Fields are demonstrating something rather astonishing about musical comedy books in "Something for the Boys." The plot, if you care to call it that, is negligible. But the individual scenes are merry enough to keep things moving without introducing anything but the mildest sort of complications as an excuse for changing the scenery now and then.

The Fields' dialogue is funny, and they are, of course, extremely lucky to have in Cole Porter a collaborator who not only writes song hits, but is also capable of turning out stunt numbers with idiotic lyrics that go on and on through encore after encore.

Cole Porter Up to His Old Tricks

Mr. Porter's new songs always sound a little like Mr. Porter's old songs nowadays. He is, perhaps, running a little short of inspiration after all these years, but there's a pleasant lilt to the meanest of them, and the foolish ones are almost always tops.

"When We're Home on the Range," sung by Miss Merman, Paula Laurence and Allen Jenkins, plays around with the cowboy ballad, and there are snatches of familiar tunes, and equally familiar lyrics, floating about the stage from time to time, but they've all been given the Porter treatment, and with Miss Merman and a good company on hand to put them over, everything fits in nicely.

In one of the Merman songs, "He's a Right Guy," Mr. Porter has even borrowed a famous Gilbertian line from "Pinafore," and as Miss Merman sings it, it sounds almost new. The idea is that with a right guy you never, never, never can go wrong. Well, hardly ever.

The story of "Something for the Boys" involves three cousins, hitherto unknown to one another, who inherit a 400-acre Texas ranch near Kelly Field, fix it up as a boarding house for student-flyers' wives, set the girls to making wartime gadgets in factory garb, and get in trouble with the authorities when a snooty Senator's daughter tells lies about the place. The snooty one happens to be engaged to the flyer Ethel Merman fancies, and that gives Miss Merman a chance to warble torchilly about what a Right Guy he is, even if he does have peculiar taste in women.

That's about all of the "plot" except that later on Miss Merman finds she's become a radio receiving set (carborundum settling in the fillings of the teeth), and passes on the idea to the Army. Every soldier his own radio is the idea.

A Smart Hassard Short Production

Howard Bay's scenery, Billy Livingston's costumes and Jack Cole's dance numbers are unfailingly attractive, and there is no doubt whatever that Hassard Short is the ideal director for this sort of production.

Miss Merman, who hasn't been seen hereabout since "Panama Hattie," is in rollicking mood in "Something for the Boys," which gives her plenty of opportunity to indulge her flair for comedy. Paula Laurence, who is immensely funny in her own right, teams up with her much of the time, and the two of them are a riot, notably in an idiotic number called, "By the Mississinewa," in which they appear as Indian maids from Indiana.

Allen Jenkins has come back from the movies to play their cousin amusingly, and Bill Johnson as the flyer-hero not only possesses a good baritone, but has an ingratiating personality and an easy manner on the stage, a combination seldom found in leading men now or at any time, for that matter.

Betty Bruce's tap dancing is expert, as usual, and there is also some nice stepping by young Bill Callahan, with Anita Alvarez, on hand to lend a Spanish touch. And we rejoiced to see that when Betty Garrett finally had a chance at a song, she did as well with it as we had expected, after seeing her in Of V We Sing!" and "Let Freedom Sing!" Miss Garrett can do a lot more than she is permitted to show in "Something for the Boys." She's definitely on her way to bigger things.

William Lynn, always remembered by Broadwayites as Erwin, the greeting card poet, in "Three Men on a Horse," is hilariously present in several of the merrier scenes at the Alvin and we thought Jed Prouty did an excellent job as the singing lawyer. To Frances Mercer fell the thankless task of playing the haughty blonde engaged to Ethel Merman's Right Guy.

Altogether an uncommonly good cast in an uncommonly good show. There is even a male chorus that can sing.

'SOMETHING FOR THE BOYS'

A musical comedy in a prologue and two acts; book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields; songs by Cole Porter; staged and lighted by Hassard Short; settings by Howard Bay; dances by Jack Cole; costumes by Billy Livingston; presented at the Alvin Theater on January 7, 1943, by Michael Todd. The cast:

Chiquita Hart	Paula Laurence
Roger Calhoun	Jed Prouty
Harry Hart	Allen Jenkins
Blossom Hart	Ethel Merman
Staff Sergt. Rocky Fulton	Bill Johnson
Sergt. Laddie Green	Stuart Langley-
Mary-Frances	Betty Garrett
Betty-Jean	Betty Bruce
Corporal Burns	Bill Callahan
Micheala	Anita Alvares
Lois, Lucille	The Barnes Twins
Lieut.-Col. S. D. Grubbs	Jack Hartley
Mr. Tobias Twitch	William Lynn
Sergt. Carter	Remi Martel
Melanie Walker	Frances Mercer
Burke	Walter Rinner
Mrs. Grubbs	Madeleine Clive

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
January 8, 1943

Something for the Boys a Hit; La Merman Shines

By BURTON RASCOE

MICHAEL TODD went to town with Something for the Boys at the Alvin last night. What he brought was Ethel Merman. And his packaging of that Koh-i-noor-in-the-rough was super de luxe, first priorities, ration A, topside —in a word, the coffee. Men growing old ungracefully wept to see what they never hoped to see again—the staging of a musical show as glamorous, kinetic, balanced and seductive as the still lamented Ziegfeld in his hey-day used to stage them.

When the curtain went up on the scene of the roof garden of the Cadet Club of the Texas Hotel in San Antonio, with cadets in summer whites and the golden girls in golden gowns entering upon a square dance, one gentleman in top hat and tails seized another gentleman in top hat and tails by the nape of the neck, dragged him away from the standees' rail and booted him down the steps to the lounge. So I heard.

Maybe some of that metal Miss Merman got in a filling, that converted her into a radio receiving set, got into my bridge work while I was laughing. But, anyhow, it seems the victim of the boot had observed at dinner that musical comedy is dead—killed, he said, by Hollywood, the radio, cheapjack producers, boogie-woogie, the strip-tease and the drying up of talents that once could write a music show with a decent book and clever lyrics and tunes that you could whistle and wanted to.

An awed listener was impressed and swayed by this seemingly profound observation; but doubt grew upon him the moment Miss Merman began to sing Something for the Boys, which was one of the hits Cole Porter wrote for the show, and doubt changed to brooding indignation as the show progressed, until he could hold back his physical reply to the dinner-table pronouncement no longer. . . . Let that be a lesson to those who are too quick to say the theater is not what it used to be.

Miss Merman is a darling who seems to grow darlinger by the minute; for it seems to me I can remember back in a not-too-distant past when I thought she was only a second-rate younger-generation Blanche Ring who would never have any rings on her fingers and bells on her toes. But last night I said here's a gal with the comic genius of Fannie Brice (or nearly) of the days when Miss Brice was playing in the Ziegfeld shows, and what she can do with a song, if it is a Cole Porter song and not the caterwauling of jive, is a stirring delight.

Joint Owners

In an unusually coherent and plausible book for a musical comedy Miss Merman, Allen Jenkins and Paula Laurence are three cousins unknown to one another who have separately been informed by an agent from the Court of Missing Heirs that the three of them are the joint owners of several thousands of acres of Texas land, left them by a deceased uncle.

At the time Miss Merman is a former chorus girl now working in a defense plant, Mr. Jenkins sells dolls and souvenir buttons on the sidewalk and Paula Laurence is just "shabby genteel" with a snooty voice. They meet on the Plaza of the Alamo in San Antonio for the first time and instantly conceive violent aversions for one another—aversions that are voiced in highly amusing dialogue.

But they patch up their differences in the prospect of striking oil on their property, only to find that the mansion they had envisioned is like something out of Tobacco Road and that the Red and Blue armies, in sham-battle maneuvers, have taken over the place.

Former Band Leader

The staff sergeant (Bill Johnson) who commandeers the ranch house is a former band leader. Blossom (Miss Merman) who goes for band leaders is already in love with him before they meet. Her hopes are dashed when she discovers he is engaged to a Senator's daughter and won't even give her a tumble except in a brotherly way. Miss Merman's fighting spirit returns, however, the moment she sets eyes on the spoiled brat (Frances Mercer) for she knows how to cope with that kind of competition. She has, meanwhile, turned the ranch house into a small defense plant, making airplane parts.

The commandant of the nearby army post mistakes the nature of the house when he sees some soldiers coming out of a room Mr. Jenkins has rented to them for a crap game and at the same time sees a number of the girl defense plant workers scantily swathed in towels and lined-up for their turns at the shower.

He declares the place out of bounds. How this mix-up is straightened out and Miss Merman gets her man is the crux of the plot.

Topnotch Comedian

Mr. Jenkins, who, in the movies is one of the topnotch comedians, was not given much of a chance to shine last night, and was actually subordinated by a comic new to me, William Lynn, who has a new kind of sanginess that kept the audience in stitches every time attention was focused on him.

Paula Laurence gave Miss Merman support that amounted to very healthy competition. Bill Johnson is a handsome and manly juvenile lead with an excellent voice that brought out the full value of such tuneful songs as 'Could It Be You? and Hey, Good Lookin'. Betty Bruce won much applause with her tap dances. The chorus was the best looking and the best drilled as well as the best costumed that has appeared on Broadway in many months.

Settings, lighting, dances, music, wit—everything about the show combines to make it intelligent, tasteful, vivacious, spirited, gay and alive. Even the slightly naughty song, By the Mississinewa, was obscurely so and was made very funny indeed by the antics of Miss Merman and Miss Laurence. . . . The show is top among the current offerings of words and music.

"Something for the Boys"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
January 8, 1943

Merman Returns and All Is Well

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

FOR the first time since Irving Berlin and the U. S. Army took over on the Fourth of July, the town has a real musical show. *Something for the Boys* is pretty clearly something for everybody. It has, preeminently, Miss Ethel Merman, who is one of the great women of the world; and Miss Merman is in high fettle and excellent form. It has a Cole Porter score that, though lacking in magic, is always serviceable and often lively. It has a book that is positively an asset to the proceedings—with a plot that never gets in your hair, and some gags that are really funny. It has a lot of pleasant people, like Paula Laurence, Allen Jenkins, Betty Bruce, Betty Garrett, Bill Johnson and William Lynn, to bear Miss Merman company. Above all, it has the pep, the bounce, the ability to stay alive, to sail ahead, to go haywire, to hit the high notes, that are the breath of good musical comedy.

Miss Merman is cast as a defense worker who, along with two cousins she has never met, falls heir to a tumbledown Texas ranch. The ranch house being nigh Kelly Field, the mercurial beneficiaries decide to turn it into a hotel for soldiers' wives, and to serve their country further by manufacturing something or other out of carborundum, if that is what you do with the stuff.

• • •

Unfortunately, the goofily innocent goings-on at the hostelry are misunderstood, and the cousins and their military pals are involved in a scandal that reaches all the way to Washington. Luckily, Miss Merman's contact with carborundum turns her at the right moment into a human receiving set—a feat that has such splendid possibilities for the Army that by curtain time the scandal is effortlessly transmogrified into a triumph.

Though Mr. Porter has lost his old *Begin-the-Beguine* and *I-Get-a-Kick-Out-of-You* magic, and has apparently abandoned his old *You're-The-Tops* nimble smartness with words, he has given the cast plenty of opportunity. Miss Merman has a lusty starter in a song that gives the show its name; a good torch number in *He's a Right Guy;* and she and Miss Laurence, dressed as squaws, have a field day with *By the Mississinewa*—a pile-up of insanity that in lesser hands could have been terrible, but that in this case brought down the house. Betty Garrett does handsomely with *I'm in Love With a Soldier Boy,* one of the best songs in the show.

The dancing and costumes are nothing remarkable, but the former is pleasant and the latter are gay. Mr. Bay has provided some attractive sets, and Hassard Short has directed with a bang.

This is the third time straight that Miss Merman and Mr. Porter have teamed up with success and *Something for the Boys* more than sustains the level of *DuBarry Was a Lady* and *Panama Hattie.* If it doesn't come close to *Anything Goes,* it's because Mr. Porter isn't the composer he once was. For Miss Merman is no less of a wow.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
January 8, 1943

Magnificent Merman

By HOWARD BARNES

A BIG, brash musical show has arrived at the Alvin to enliven mid-season stage doings. "Something for the Boys" is definitely a tonic entertainment. Although the book is something of a grab-bag, the triumphant Ethel Merman is on hand at every flagging moment of the offering to give it tremendous bounce and vitality. Since it is also ornamented with Cole Porter songs, a large, willing and expert company and handsome trappings, this Michael Todd production should be the answer to playgoers prayers for a long time to come.

• • •

On the whole, the newest song-and-dance carnival is more boisterous than distinguished. Mr. Porter has written far better tunes and ditties than he has for "Something for the Boys." Herbert and Dorothy Fields chop it right off the cob in a lot of the material for their libretto. What matters is that the proceedings, keyed to Miss Merman's consummate clowning and chanting, have an infectious gaiety which is irresistible. You can scarcely fail to be enchanted by the comically insulting repartee of the principals. You are certain to be delighted by the marvelous song called "By the Mississinewa" and impressed by such stage effects as a bomber roaring across the Alvin stage.

• • •

It is not making much of a critical discovery to state that the star of "Something for the Boys" is in a class by herself. Anyway, she is, and particularly so in a musical that proffers her only so-so support. For much of the time Miss Merman is out there, putting over second-rate gags and songs. Since she has brilliant assistance from Paula Laurence and is frequently surrounded by flashy dancing and singing ensembles all is well. Even when the story labors through an account of three stumble-bums who inherit a Texas ranch adjacent to Kelly Field and raise all sorts of hob with the Army the performances glitter in the best musical comedy tradition.

• • •

My favorite moment in the show is that in which Miss Merman and Miss Laurence go into a daffy and irrelevant Indian routine in the "By the Mississinewa" number, but there are a series of bright interludes to make one overlook the laggard aspects of the exhibit. Allen Jenkins, playing one of the unholy trio which gives the Army some bad moments, is as good as he ever was on the screen; Bill Johnson has some pleasantly unaccented scenes of romance with the star; Betty Garrett sings "I'm in Love With a Soldier Boy" with verve and skill and William Lynn, of "Three Men on a Horse" fame, wanders about in a funny caricature of a Texas miser who collects counterfeit money.

• • •

Hassard Short was the man to stage this bountiful entertainment. He has done it shrewdly. There is never any letup in the pace, and the individual and group scenes are equally effective. With a bit better material in the line of book and songs, "Something for the Boys" would be something for the books. As it is, Miss Merman and her knowing collaborators succeed in making it one of the song-and-dance delights of the season.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
January 8, 1943

'Something for the Boys' Features Songs by Cole Porter, Book by the Fields

By G. E. BLACKFORD

AS GAY, sparkling and speedy a bit of froth as has been whipped up behind the footlights in many a month came to town last night when Mr. Michael Todd returned Ethel Merman to Broadway in the new Cole Porter-Herbert and Dorothy Fields musical comedy, "Something for the Boys," at the Alvin Theatre.

"Something for the Boys" is really something, something for all the boys and all the girls. Mr. Todd has given it a lovely production, beautifully costumed and expertly turned out. It fits Miss Merman like a glove and she romps and rollicks in it to her—and the audience's—content. It is a lot of fun for everybody.

Miss Merman is very ably seconded in her new funfest by Miss Paula Laurence, late of "Junior Miss" and previously of the town's better bistros, in which her individual brand of comic nonsense won her a flock of enthusiastic followers.

Sharing the chief supporting honors with Miss Laurence is Allen Jenkins, back to the Broadway stage after half a score of years under the klieg lights in Hollywood.

• • •

Backing up the principals in "Something for the Boys" is a flock of specialists—lovely Betty Bruce, whose ballet-taps sound out in rhythmic punctuation; a new bundle of hoydenish dynamite named Anita Alvarez who halted the proceedings with her first-act antics; Bill Johnson of last year's "Banjo Eyes," who as Miss Merman's heart-throb in the show, sings one of Mr. Porter's new songs very effectively; pert Betty Garrett, whom we last saw in "Let Freedom Sing"; sixteen-year-old Bill Callahan who, the program says, tried to get into the show as a singer and wound up as one of the featured dancers; and the De Marlos, smooth dance duo making their stage debut.

But all the way through it is Miss Merman and Miss Laurence whose excellently balanced clowning give "Something for the Boys" its zest. There's never a dull moment when they're around and they're around most all of the time. They make a grand team, stopping the show cold in the second act's "By the Mississinewa," an Indian-costumed duet of much rhyme, little reason and great hilarity.

And earlier, they score heavily in company with Mr. Jenkins in "When We're Home on the Range," a neat bit of musical comedy conceit.

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Miss Merman introduces four of Mr. Porter's new songs, the title number "Something for the Boys," "Hey, Good Looking" and "The Leader of a Big Time Band"—all swingy numbers especially fitted to her popular style—and a semi-torch composition, "He's A Right Guy."

Other new tuneful contributions in the show are "See That You're Born in Texas," sung by the ensemble; "When My Baby Goes to Town," sung by Bill Johnson, as also is "Could It Be You?"; Betty Garrett's "I'm in Love with a Soldier Boy," and "There's a Happy Land in the Sky," done by Miss Merman, Miss Laurence, Mr. Jenkins, Mr. Johnson and William Lynn, who further enlivens the evening in his role of an eccentric Texas squatter who makes counterfeit money just because he loves to count it over and over.

Background of the new vehicle in which Miss Merman frolics is a Texas air training camp, to which she, Miss Laurence and Mr. Jenkins come as long missing heirs to a wide expanse of adjoining area. Miss Merman is fresh from a defense factory in New Jersey. Miss Laurence from a Kansas City night club and Mr. Jenkins from his Sixth avenue souvenir-hawking.

Their inheritance turns out to be a white elephant, so they turn the dilapidated mansion into a combination boarding house and war gadget factory. The wives of the boys at camp are the boarder-workers and all is merry until a Senator's daughter in the person of Miss Frances Mercer, fiancee of the boy la Merman has fallen in love with, turns up to grab off credit and publicity for the novel idea.

If you know your Merman and your musical comedy routine, you can take it from there. Miss Merman takes Miss Mercer for a ride, a ride down a conveyor belt into the collection basket. Miss Mercer gets the officer commanding the camp to close up the enterprise and all is black clouds until Miss Merman finds she has turned into a radio receiving set (it all is because the fillings in her teeth have become magnetized or something) and saves the day when they're all up in an airplane and the radio goes dead in a storm.

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It would be slighting indeed not to type a few words anent the fine chorus that Mr. Hassard Short assembled for "Something for the Boys."

The young ladies are very young, very fresh and attractive, their costumes are a delight to the eye and their dancing, in company with that of their partners, is excellent. Mr. Jack Cole, who directed them, is to be congratulated. They do a lot of lovely work, and are responsible in large measure for the really high appeal the new show possesses.

All in all, Mr. Todd's New Year's gift to Broadway — even if a few days belated — is quite on the beam and sets a fast pace for the remainder of the season to follow.